Conference on Disarmament

English

Final record of the one thousand three hundred and seventy-fifth plenary meeting
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 19 February 2016, at 10.10 a.m.

President: Mr. Peters Emuze ..... (Nigeria)

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The President: I call to order the 1375th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. On Tuesday we discussed the draft decision on a programme of work as contained in document CD/WP.594. I have listened carefully to all your comments and interventions, and additionally in the past two days I have conducted further consultations in the hope that common ground could be reached in the grey areas that have hampered progress on a draft programme of work. I received very useful suggestions; however, given the little time left for this presidency, it would not be propitious to alter the draft we have already presented in plenary, as that would entail another exercise for member States to again refer a new document to their capitals. In view of this, it is my understanding that this draft programme of work is still not ready to be adopted by the Conference. It is my hope that the presidency of Norway will take it from here and explore further avenues to reach agreement on this matter. At this time, I would like to open the floor for any delegation who wishes to speak. I have on my list Zimbabwe, but I am told the Ambassador of Zimbabwe is still on his way. The floor is now open for any delegation who wishes to speak. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Pakistan.

Ms. Janjua (Pakistan): Mr. President, we take this opportunity to thank you very much for all the effort that you have put into trying to develop a programme of work. We appreciate the wide consultations that you have held, and we appreciate the fact that you listened to all the discussions within this chamber very carefully and tried to respond to them through presenting a working paper. We also appreciate the fact that you continued consultations after you presented the working paper at the last meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. We appreciate the fact that there has been a clear indication by many delegations, including mine, that any draft presented to the Conference should be based on consensus and should take into account the concerns of all member States. We appreciate the fact that you have taken this into account and that this excellent work that you have done will be passed on to our colleague, the Ambassador of Norway, to continue work on it, to see what his views are on the work that has been done. It has not been time wasted, it has been time that has been very usefully employed, where we have had detailed discussions and these discussions have clarified the points of view of different delegations on the working paper, as well as on how they perceive the programme of work and the work of the Conference throughout the session. So I thank you very much, and I also thank your colleagues who have worked very hard with you, and I thank the secretariat for the support they have given to you as well. We look forward to working with you as one of us and also with the new President of the Conference.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Pakistan for her kind statement and for the kind words addressed to the President. I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Varma (India): Mr. President, let me briefly convey to you that we fully endorse and support the approach that you have adopted. The first presidency of a session of the Conference on Disarmament entails a heavy burden and the responsibility not just of having the agenda adopted but also of conducting consultations to see if we can put up the programme of work, and this responsibility you have discharged with great distinction. I have requested the floor just to convey our appreciation for the manner in which you have consulted; we appreciate that the Indian delegation has been consulted at every stage. We endorse your conclusion that more work needs to be done on the draft proposal for a programme of work, and we are confident that the excellent basis of work that you have already undertaken will stand us in good stead when we move to the next presidency of the Ambassador of Norway.

The President: I thank the representative of India for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the President. Would any other delegation like to take the floor? Is the representative of Zimbabwe here now?

I now give the floor to the representative of Austria.

Mr. Zehetner (Austria): At the outset, allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the high post of the President of the Conference on Disarmament. The Austrian delegation lends its full support to you and all six Presidents of this year and your endeavours to reach an agreement on a programme of work to start negotiations.

Austria considers functioning multilateral disarmament regimes to be a vital component of an international security framework based on a human security approach. The Conference has played an important role in this regard in the past. However, as we are painfully aware, it has been in deadlock for almost two decades now. With every passing year, it is further losing credibility and legitimacy as a body of multilateral disarmament negotiations. While this lack of progress may be lamented by all, the maintenance of the status quo might appear to be rather comfortable for some. And the Conference has become a tool to entrench such an approach.

This is a serious concern — and it is a fact, a fact that contrasts with the widespread agreement within the international community on the urgency of nuclear disarmament. A very large majority of States want to make progress through multilateral cooperation, but the dysfunction of the multilateral disarmament machinery continues.

Mr. President, before further elaborating on the Conference, let me take this opportunity to briefly refer to the Open-ended Working Group to develop proposals to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations that will start here in Geneva next Monday. It builds upon the work of the previous Working Group, convened in 2013, which was widely seen as a constructive forum. Its final report was adopted by consensus based on substantive discussions. The new Working Group offers an inclusive forum open for the active participation of all States, international organizations, civil society and academia. With the objective of having an interactive dialogue, it is set up in a manner that all perspectives can be presented, discussed and reflected in its outcome document. It will strive to reach agreement and agree recommendations for the General Assembly. As one of the co-sponsors of the resolution establishing the Working Group, Austria would like to reiterate the invitation to participate and to consider it as an important opportunity to address a whole range of issues that need to be discussed to attain and maintain a world without nuclear weapons.

Mr. President, there has been a lot of debate here in Geneva in recent weeks on whether the Working Group and the Conference are in competition with one another, or whether they should rather be seen as complementary. We believe that this is a moot point. The mandates of the Working Group and the Conference differ substantively. On the one hand, the Working Group's report might help to lay the foundation for the start of real multilateral negotiations and thus contribute to overcoming the stalemate of the Conference. On the other hand, the General Assembly's mandate for the Conference is to operate as a negotiating body to negotiate treaties on disarmament and arms control issues of great importance to international peace and security, a mandate that it has not been able to fulfil for almost two decades. During the deliberations throughout these years, Austria has always demonstrated its commitment and supported the start of negotiations on any or all of the core issues, without artificial linkages between issues being drawn. We have consistently displayed full flexibility in this regard.

But it is our long-standing conviction that pretending to be engaging in substantive work where in fact this is not the case would only further weaken the role of the Conference. Or to put it differently: if the emperor has no clothes on, by simply putting on a hat, he remains without clothes. We should not pretend otherwise.

In the view of Austria, it is not despite the current challenging global security context, but because of it, that we must work with urgency to get negotiations on key disarmament issues started. A proposal for a programme of work has to reflect this sense of

urgency. All proposals should show a level of ambition that goes beyond maintaining the status quo. Mere discussions can never be a substitute for "substantive work" according to the mandate of the Conference — that is, negotiating treaties to achieve and maintain a world without nuclear weapons. We have seen efforts in recent weeks to start negotiations. We believe that we should continue with these efforts to strive for the adoption of a programme of work that would result in the start of negotiations — not just an exchange of views.

Mr. President, the enlargement of the Conference is an issue of particular importance for Austria. The current restricted membership leads to a democratic legitimacy deficit which can only be described as anachronistic. We therefore strongly support opening our doors in order to make it a more inclusive forum.

Talking about opening up, Austria is convinced that the multilateral disarmament discourse hugely benefits from engaging more closely with civil society, academia and the wider public. The glaring emptiness of the generously designed balcony of this Council Chamber offers the most eloquent testimony — or indeed rather silent testimony — of the urgent need for the Conference to open its ears and doors to all interested stakeholders. It is in our very own interest to do so. In addition, Austria has repeatedly called for overcoming the restrictive interpretation of the rules of procedure of the Conference.

In conclusion, it is the political will of member States, or the lack thereof, which is determining the progress in multilateral disarmament efforts, that remains the key concern. For Austria, global disarmament is a pressing issue that requires our fullest attention, and we will continue to work towards re-establishing the credibility of the global nuclear disarmament efforts that so far have fallen far beneath our expectations.

The President: I thank the representative of Austria for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the President. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Brazil.

Mr. Sampaio Fernandes (Brazil): Unfortunately my Ambassador was not able to attend this meeting, Mr. President, but I should like to express our gratitude for your efforts in trying to achieve a consensus regarding not only the Nigerian proposal but all other proposals that were presented, including by the Western European and Other States, by informal consultation and by the United Kingdom. Brazil believes that any kind of action that can help us to move the Conference on Disarmament forward is welcome, and we are committed to keep contributing constructively to the work of the Conference. Regarding the Nigerian proposal, we believe that the text can be improved, although we really appreciate the effort made. We wish to convey the message that we are ready to keep working with the Norwegian presidency to try to reach a consensus in the room in order to have a programme of work for the 2016 session.

The President: I thank the representative for Brazil for his statement and kind words to the President. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Zimbabwe.

Mr. Mushayavanhu (Zimbabwe): My apologies, Mr. President, for stepping into the chamber a little late. Since this is the first time that I am taking the floor under your presidency, my delegation would like to commend you for the way you have been chairing the proceedings, as well as for the submission of a draft programme of work and your efforts to break the decades-long deadlock that has been impeding this body's ability to undertake substantive work. Zimbabwe would also like to take this opportunity to extend its gratitude to the Presidents of the 2015 session of the Conference on Disarmament, whose robust efforts and creativity raised our hopes that both negotiations and the resumption of substantive work were within reach.

I would also like to echo the comments made by some colleagues throughout our deliberations, that the Conference remains the single multilateral forum for disarmament.

We are therefore concerned that this body has not been able to fulfil this important mandate. Consequently, efforts to get this august body working again must be redoubled. In the light of the statement by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, to the Conference, warning that this body was at risk of marginalization, I would like to add my voice to the refrain in saying that the Conference's credibility is at great risk. When it comes to disarmament, it appears as if we are going back in time. Instead of nuclear disarmament, we see a reaffirmation of the antiquated doctrine of nuclear deterrence.

My delegation is seriously concerned about this inertia in disarmament because, as a nation, Zimbabwe takes its international responsibilities as a member of the Conference very seriously. Indeed, we attach great importance to the work and mandate of the Conference. Zimbabwe opposed the indefinite extension of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1995. Our deep concern at the time and now is that whereas there is some progress on the non-proliferation agenda, there is no progress where disarmament is concerned. The events of May 2015 in New York at the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference have indeed served to vindicate the position we took in 1995 as a country. Our fears then that nuclear-weapon States had no intention to disarm have been sadly confirmed. Now there is neither pressure nor a desire to disarm. We are therefore concerned that while the majority of member States are continuously lectured to and reminded to fulfil their international obligations under the various non-proliferation instruments, others are working towards the modernization of their arsenals. We are further concerned that whether it is the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty or a potential fissile material cut-off treaty, non-proliferation is taking precedence over disarmament. To avoid any doubt, our position is for a world free of nuclear weapons. That is why my country is strongly committed to the building of a nuclear-weapon-free zone, through which all countries from the African region committed themselves to ban the manufacture, acquisition and testing of nuclear weapons. However, while the Treaty of Pelindaba underscores the commitment of Africa to nuclear disarmament and to a world free of nuclear weapons, the unfortunate reality is that African countries are neither immune to nor insulated from the horrendous effects of the use of nuclear weapons by countries from other regions. In fact, these weapons pose an existential threat to humankind.

It is our belief that the draft programme of work contained in document CD/WP.594 was a good start to the year and would have signalled the willingness of member States to get this Conference working again. It is therefore unfortunate that it could not be adopted. It is for this reason that Zimbabwe stood ready to join consensus on this document, because the continued failure to undertake any substantive work by the Conference is both untenable and unacceptable. Indeed, we owe it to the rest of the international community to deliver on our important mandate.

Mr. President, as a member of the Group of 21, it was indeed a pleasure to have Nigeria chairing the Conference's first session in 2016. I would like to assure you of our support and cooperation, even though it is the tail end of your Presidency, in the endeavours that we all should be embarking on to revitalize the Conference on Disarmament.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Zimbabwe for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the President. Would any other delegation like to take the floor? That does not seem to be the case. Colleagues, as this is the last formal plenary meeting under my presidency, I would like to make some concluding remarks.

In the past weeks, my presidency carried out a series of consultations before arriving at the draft programme of work, which is still a kind of work in progress. I thank the Ambassadors of Germany, Brazil, Indonesia and Tunisia, who kindly agreed to be the coordinators of the four working groups that we are going to set up. It is our hope that the Norwegian presidency will utilize their experience and also find useful the draft schedule of

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activities which we have also drawn up in anticipation. Let me inform you that the interest of Nigeria in disarmament spans over 40 years, having been a member of the first Eighteen-Nation Committee on Disarmament, established in 1962, two years after her independence in 1960. The interest of Nigeria in this subject has continued to grow. In introducing the draft proposal on the programme of work, we are convinced that member States of this body intend to consult and possibly reconcile some grey areas that have stalled progress for a long time, to make way for kick-starting negotiations at the Conference on Disarmament in line with the mandate of the body. We believe that in order to break the current deadlock that has characterized the work of the Conference since 1996, member States should show mutual understanding, accommodation and willingness to adjust national policy positions in the overall interest of all. Nigeria therefore believes that with a blend of political will and commitment, the Conference on Disarmament will witness real disarmament negotiations and overcome the now two decades of stalemate. Permit me to add that the task before this Conference is a huge responsibility for which the world, indeed humanity, looks upon us. Throughout my consultations, and in plenary, member States have continued to uphold their well-known previous positions on the core agenda items of the Conference without shifting ground. This is indeed regrettable. However, I believe hope is not lost, no matter how audacious it is. I will leave you with one experience that I encountered in the process of my consultation with one ambassador. This is what he said: "I was posted here 20 years ago and I was negotiating disarmament when my daughter was born. My daughter is now 20 years old, I am still negotiating disarmament without a breakthrough. Now what will I tell my daughter?" Excellencies, dear colleagues, this is the question. What will the baby that was born 20 years ago think of us now? What does world think of us? The Conference has been in labour for too long. It is time to move.

I thank you all, and I wish you all the best. While thanking you for the support you have extended to me, my thanks also go to the conference officers, the interpreters and the members of the secretariat. My good wishes go to my colleague and friend, the Ambassador of Norway, for his presidency. In conformity with the tradition of this Conference, I invite you all to a reception that I will host at the Intercontinental Hotel this evening at 6.30 p.m.

This concludes our business for today. The next plenary meeting will be held on Tuesday, 23 February 2016, at 10 a.m. under the presidency of Norway. This meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m.